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ABSTRACT

This is a 2001 report on the enrollment and progress for basic skills students in Washington State's community and technical colleges. Report highlights include: (1) 15% of all state-support instruction is in basic skills; (2) 53% of basic skills instruction is in English second language (ESL) programs; and (3) adult basic education (ABE) and general education (GED) programs have also increased continuously over the past five years. The report also shows that 57% of basic skills students are students of color. The median age of basic skills students is 29 years. Basic skills students are shown to earn considerably less money than other college-level students do. The majority of basic skills students show earnings below the poverty level (less than $1180/month for a family of three). In addition, over half of all basic skills students fail to complete more than one quarter. The state board reports that community colleges and districts have to improve retention and increase the amount of instruction time to reach its target goal of significantly increasing the basic skills of 80% of the students in these programs. (Contains 10 tables.) (MKF)

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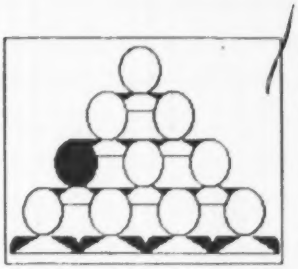

Research Report No. 01-2

Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges

ENROLLMENTS, STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS, PROGRESS AND SUCCESS FOR BASIC SKILLS STUDENTS IN STATE SUPPORT INSTRUCTION IN COMMUNITY AND TECHNICAL COLLEGES

November 2001

Background

Community and technical colleges have a threefold mission: to prepare students for academic transfer, to provide workforce preparation, and to provide adult basic skills and literacy education. Basic skills instruction primarily includes Adult Basic Education (ABE) for students with less than ninth grade reading, writing, and math skills, GED Preparation for students lacking a high school diploma, and English as a Second Language (ESL) for immigrants, refugees, and others with limited English proficiency. By policy, basic skills instruction is targeted to the "most in need". Some college-level students who have high school diplomas or GEDs may have to enroll in other pre-college brush-up math, reading, writing, and study skills classes along with their college-level coursework. This developmental instruction that is also financial aid eligible is not adult basic skills.

Traditionally, basic skills students are described as a group. Describing basic skills students in this way may mask important differences among colleges, programs and students. This has implications for policy. A recent examination of the issue of tuition and fees for basic skills courses from the points of view of student access, potential revenue, impact on student outcomes, and statewide policy required the need to analyze basic skills students at the program level (ABE, ESL, GED). This report describes state supported basic skills full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollments, student characteristics, and progress in academic year 2000-01.

Findings

Washington State faces a growing need for basic skills training to meet the needs of low-skilled adults under-prepared for the work force and to assimilate the high number of immigrant and refugees who settle here.

- Fifteen percent of all state support instruction is provided in basic skills. In AY 2000-01, this represented 19,512 FTEs (annualized full-time state support equivalents) of instruction.
- FTEs in basic skills have grown 28 percent in the past five years. This compares to 4 percent growth in academic course effort and 2 percent growth in workforce instruction.
- The primary reason for the basic skills growth rate has been due to an increase in English as a Second Language instruction. Washington State has the fifth largest number of refugee and immigrant settlements and the second highest number of secondary settlements after initial

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placement elsewhere. ESL is the largest program (53 percent of FTEs), growing at a rate of 6 percent per year.

- ABE (27 percent of FTEs) along with GED and HS completion (12 percent of FTEs together) have also grown 4 to 5 percent per year. In 1992, Washington administered the State Adult Literacy Survey that estimated 200,000-500,000 adults (16 or older) were deficient in basic skills needed for their roles as parents, workers and citizens.

While pre-college developmental instruction is aimed at brushing up the skills of students concurrently enrolled in college-level courses, basic skills instruction is for students with low skills or lacking a high school diploma.

- Half of all ESL instruction is focused on students with the lowest levels of language proficiency who typically are learning basic directions and survival English.

- Most of ABE and GED instruction is also provided primarily for students with skills below the ninth grade level.

Colleges vary in how they deliver ESL, ABE and GED depending upon their student mix and location.

- The percent of instruction colleges offered in ESL compared to ABE and GED varied from 20 percent to 78 percent at colleges. The percent of instruction offered in ABE varied from 18 percent to 77 percent. GED instruction varied from 3 percent to 27 percent.

- Colleges delivered basic skills differently depending upon their geographic location and their students' transportation and location barriers. Just under half (48 percent) of all basic skills FTE enrollments were held off-campus. This compares to 17 percent of all other state support FTE enrollments for academic, vocational, and pre-college courses that were held are off-campus. ABE and GED have the greatest share offered off-campus (55 and 50 percent respectively).

Basic skills students are more diverse students than other college-level students. They also are more likely to be parents. Low basic skills is an employment barrier and basic skills students stayed employed for shorter periods and are more likely to be low-income than workers who have high school education or beyond. Characteristics are distributed differently among ESL, ABE and GED students.

- 64,500 students participated in basic skills instruction in AY 2000-01. Over half (57 percent) of all basic skills participants are students of color. This compares to 24 percent of state support students enrolled for workforce and transfer, and to 21 percent of the state population as a whole. Hispanics comprise nearly half (49 percent) of ESL students. Whites are 49 percent of ABE students.

- The median age of basic skills students is 29 years. ESL students are typically older (33 years) than ABE (27 years) or GED (23 years) students. Nine percent of all basic skills students are under 19 years.

- The typical basic skills student is less likely to be employed full- or part-time than other college-level students. About one-third (35 percent) of basic skills students worked full-time or part-time while they attended college, compared to 56 percent of all other state support students.

- Of those basic skills students that are working, the majority has earnings below poverty. In the most recent match with employment records, two-thirds of those students with reported earning during training, earned less than poverty (less than $1180/month for a family of three).

- Student characteristics also differ with programs. For example, Hispanics comprise 57 percent of all Level 1 (beginning level) ESL students. The typical student is young (22 years). He is more likely to have family and work responsibilities than other students at this level or than Hispanics entering at higher levels.

To reach the long-term target that 80 percent of students enrolled in basic skills will make significant gains, programs need to improve student retention and narrow gaps between Hispanics, Native Americans and the other sub-groups.

- Research shows that making gains in basic skills is directly related to persistence and intensity of instruction. Less than half (48 percent) of all basic skills students are retained for more than one quarter. Fewer Hispanics (44 percent) and fewer Native Americans (35 percent) are retained more than one quarter.

Conclusion

The findings in this report demonstrate that policy-making for basic skills students should take into account program and competency level differences among students served. In the case of the tuition study some of the important differences that emerged were: the differences in delivery of basic skills compared to college-level classes which had implications for how payments could be collected; the differences in student characteristics with implications for how student access might change depending upon which classes are assessed; and the importance of persistence and retention with implications for program quality.

Section 1: Enrollments

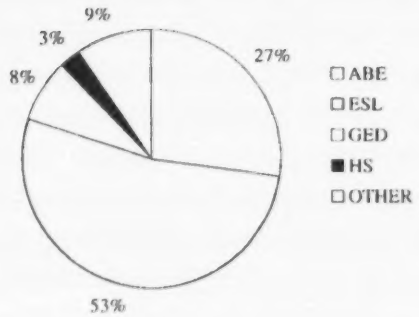
Basic Skills Program Enrollments

Basic skills instruction represented 19,512 annualized state support full-time equivalent (FTEs) during academic year 2000-01. Fifteen percent of all state support instruction is provided in basic skills. Instruction in basic skills has increased nearly 28 percent in the past five years.

10,351 FTES of instruction is in ESL. ESL historically has grown 6 percent per year. Washington State receives the fifth highest number of refugee resettlements each year. Refugees, and immigrants receive about 55 percent of ESL instruction.

5,285 FTEs of instruction is provided in ABE. The remaining state support basic skills instruction is directed to GED (1,501 FTEs), High School Completion (533 FTEs) and other basic skills programs that include sheltered workshop training and goal setting classes (1,842 FTEs). ABE and GED instruction are also expected to increase to meet the employment needs of this under-prepared group.

Annualized State Support FTEs by Basic Skills Program 2000-01

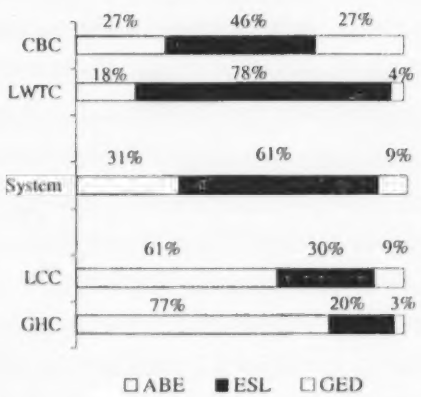


Program Enrollments by College

The program mix for ABE, ESL and GED instruction varies by college depending upon local needs. For the college system as a whole, 61 percent of instruction in these three main courses is offered in ESL. As an example, this varies from 78 percent of instruction at Lake Washington Technical College to 20 percent of instruction at Grays Harbor College and 30 percent at Lower Columbia College.

ABE accounts for 31 percent of system instruction in these three areas. It varies from 77 percent at Grays Harbor to 27 percent at Columbia Basin. GED instruction varies from 27 percent of instruction at Columbia Basin to 3 percent at Grays Harbor.

Basic Skills Program Enrollments by College

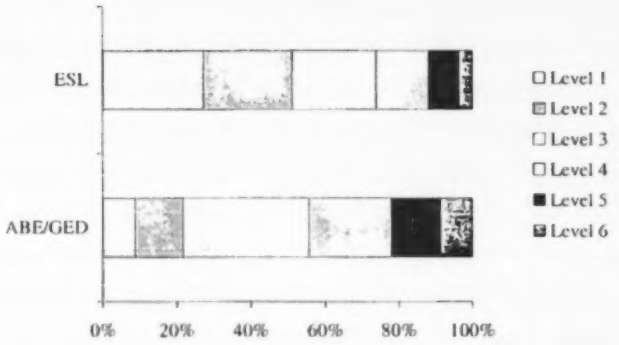


Competency Level Enrollment

The majority of basic skills enrollments are students with low skill levels. ESL provides six levels for pre-literacy to advanced language competency. Half of all ESL instruction was provided in courses at the two lowest competency levels. Less than 4 percent of courses were at an advanced level that is still below pre-college ESL.

ABE instruction is offered at four levels. GED provides two levels of test preparation beyond ABE. Over three-quarters of instruction is provided below the level of GED test preparation (below ninth grade).

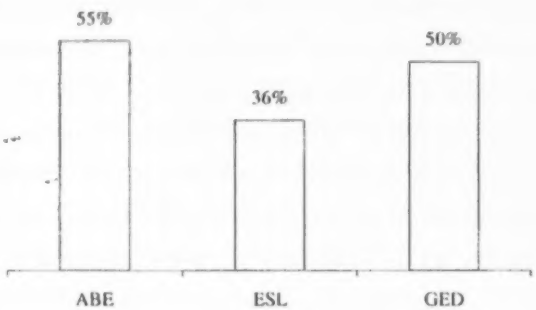
ESL and ABE/GED Enrollments by Student Competency Level



Course Enrollments By Location

Basic skills far more than other college classes are likely to be delivered away from the college campus. Just under half (48 percent) of basic skills state support FTEs enrolled off-campus. This compares to 11 percent of academic and 24 percent of vocation FTEs. The percent of basic skills instruction provided away from the main campus varies by program area.

% of FTEs in Locations Off-Campus

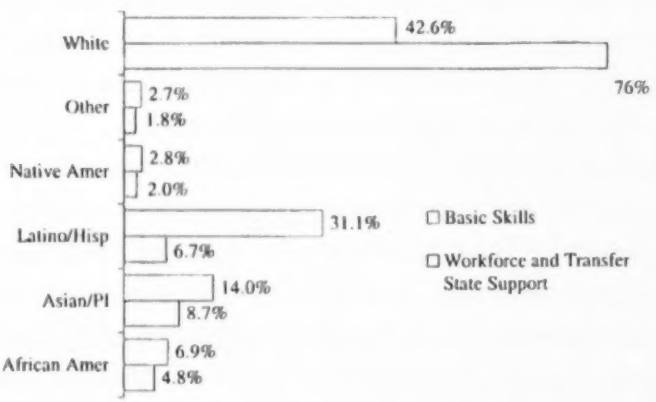


Section II: Students

Race and Ethnicity

In AY 2000-01, 64,500 students received basic skills instruction. Community and technical college enrollments are more diverse (28 percent of color) than the state population (21 percent of color). Basic skills students (57 percent of color), however, were more diverse than other state support students (24 percent of color).

Race and Ethnicity: Basic Skills and All Other State Support Students Fall 2000

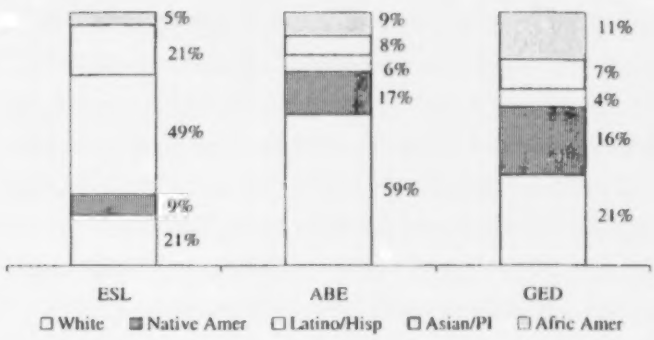


Race and Ethnicity by Basic Skills Program

Seventy-nine percent of ESL participants are students of color compared to about 40 percent of ABE and GED students. Nearly half (49 percent) of ESL students are Hispanics.

Students of color are distributed differently within programs as well. For example, Latino students comprise a larger share of ESL Level 1 students (57 percent) than of ESL Level 6 students (22 percent).

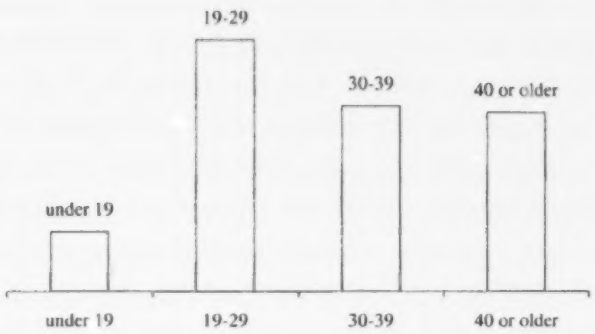
Race and Ethnicity ABE, GED and ESL Students Fall 2000



Age of Students

The median age for all basic skills students is 29 years. Nine percent of basic skills students are younger than 19 years. ESL students typically are older than ABE or GED students (median age ESL 33 years old, compared to 27 years for ABE and 23 years for GED students).

Basic Skills Students by Age

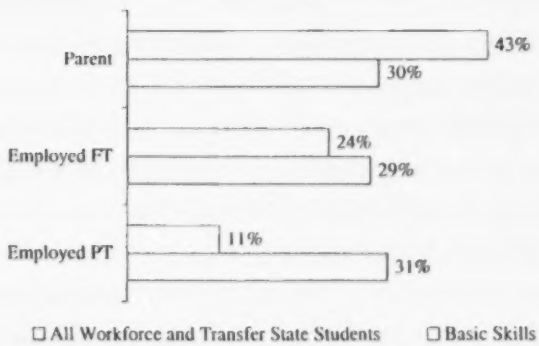


Family and Work

More basic skills students are parents (43 percent) compared to other state support students (30 percent). Basic skills students are nearly half as likely as workforce or transfer students to work full or part-time (35 percent compared to 60 percent).

ESL students are most likely to have family responsibilities (48 percent parents) and the most likely to be working.

Family and Employment Status Fall 2000

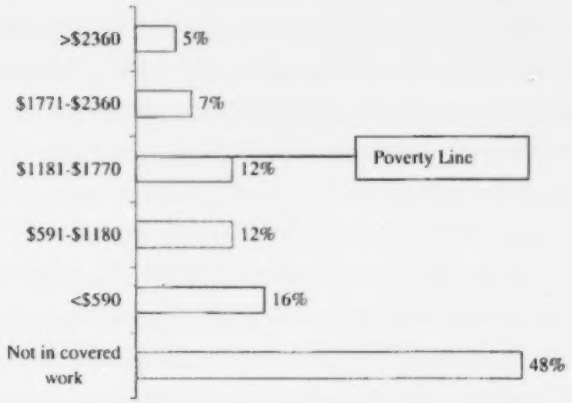


Earnings from Employment

As found in the Washington State Population Survey, low-income working adults typically are more likely to work fewer weeks in the year and more likely to have short, temporary jobs than other working adults with more education and English proficiency.

The graph to the right represents 42,000 basic skills students from 1998-99, the most recent SBCTC match to unemployment records. Nearly half (48 percent) of the students matched had no reported earnings in training. 28 percent reported earnings less than poverty for a family of three ($1,180/month). About one-quarter (24 percent) had monthly earnings above the poverty line; 12 percent earned 150-200 percent of poverty.

Basic Skills Student Earnings as % of Poverty

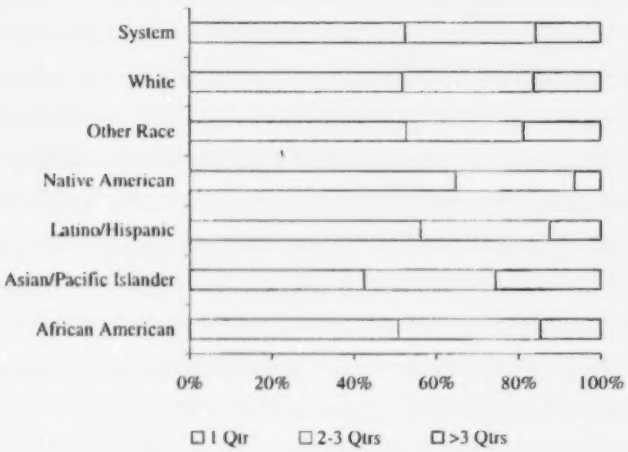


Student Persistence

Colleges have set a long-term target that 80 percent of students will make substantial competency gains. Research shows that substantial gain in basic skills is directly linked to student retention and persistence.

More than half (52 percent) of all basic skills students leave after one quarter. About 16 percent attend for three or more quarters over a two-year period. The rest (32 percent) attend two-three quarters. Students advancing at least one competency level needed to persist for about 130 hours of instruction. ESL students required greater intensity (159 average hours) to attain a competency gain. ABE (85 hrs) and GED (54 hrs) required fewer hours. Hispanics and Native Americans attended fewer quarters and persisted fewer hours than all other student groups. The graph presents quarters attended for a cohort of students that enrolled exclusively in basic skills in fall 1999 and measured retention in the college system over a two-year period.

Qtrs Attended Over 2 Year Period



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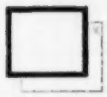

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